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[Opening Keynote] Promoting epistemic justice through knowledge exchange

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Holliman, R. (2019). 'Promoting epistemic justice through knowledge exchange'. Opening Keynote at the Research and Knowledge Exchange Conference, University of East London, 27 June.



Good morning everyone. My name is Richard Holliman and I'm Professor of Engaged Research at the Open University.

I'm also the OU's Academic Lead for Engaged Research, at least I am for the next three days. I'm about to become Head of School, but that's another story.

Before I start my talk, I'd like to note that I've posted a copy of these slides on the Engaging Research blog.

The URL is on this slide: www.open.ac.uk/blogs/per. If you want to access any of the resources from the talk, the images have embedded links within them.

Okay, let's get going...

I'd like to thank Professor Brown as your Pro Vice-Chancellor for Impact and Innovation for her kind invitation to attend this conference. I'd also like to thank her for asking me to deliver this keynote address, and to act as one of two rapporteurs for the conference.

Why did Verity invite me to talk to you today? I think it's partly because I delivered my inaugural lecture earlier this year on the topic of 'Fairness in knowing' and what this should mean for how we engage with the sciences (Holliman, 2019).

To be clear, I'm not going to focus on engagement with the sciences today. I'll be discussing research and knowledge exchange conducted across all disciplines.

In my inaugural lecture, I argued that engaged research should be underpinned by a moral imperative.

If you'd like to watch the lecture, there's a video replay that's online; see the link embedded in the image on this slide or the recent post about the lecture on my Engaging Research blog.

Part of what I want to do this morning is to develop those earlier arguments in the context of some of your work and the philosophical concept of epistemic

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justice. Hence, my title, 'Promoting epistemic justice through knowledge exchange'.



I'd also like to thank Matthew Whyte, your Head of Research & Knowledge Exchange Support, who has been really helpful in supporting my preparations for this event.

Matthew helpfully shared the early details of many of the conference abstracts in advance. That has helped me to tailor the content of my talk.

In working through your abstracts, I was impressed by the knowledge exchange work that is being undertaken by UEL researchers with a wide range of publics, community organisations, stakeholders and end-users.

In particular, I was struck by how much of your work seeks to address issues of social justice, not least because this echoes the mission of the Open University. The slide is informed by the OU's current Academic Strategy. It links our mission, vision and values.

You'll see that social justice is a core underpinning value, manifest through our commitment to inclusive, responsive, responsible approaches to engaged research.

I saw many echoes of these commitments in your knowledge exchange work, and through your strategic commitment to "Your Future Life" where you will:

"...increase the economic, social and cultural impact of your education, applied research and enterprise activity".

How do we make this work in practice? As the OU's Academic Lead for Engaged Research I've recently been part of a team that produced our new institutional strategy for research and enterprise.

In that document, I've argued that to achieve our mission requires a sophisticated strategy for co-constructing 'publics' for research, and in building capacity to enable meaningful engagement.

This requires a more nuanced take on what it means to increase our reach in our research and knowledge exchange activities.

This will be an important theme in my talk.

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The final issue that I want to highlight at this stage is the significance of place. I argued in my inaugural lecture that the Open University is a 'boundary organisation' through our openness to people, places, methods and ideas (Holliman, 2019).

Part of my rationale for this argument was based on the need to think beyond a civic mission for our university, i.e. one that is anchored within a specific locality.

Making a contribution locally is clearly important, but I argue that a civic mission should not be the sole focus for a university.

Again, I saw echoes of a broader conceptualisation of place in some of your knowledge exchange work. At times you are local and regional, at others national, at others international and sometimes global.

What I'm proposing here is that the culture and ethos of our two universities, at least in terms of research and knowledge exchange, are aligned in some fairly significant ways.

I would like to leave it to you to confirm or disabuse me of this notion when it comes to the Q&A, or later today as we move through the conference sessions.



Universities, researchers and knowledge exchange professionals are working in a challenging context. Calls for change in higher education have been a constant over recent years.

I therefore wanted to say a few words about how we got to where we are now, and what the direction of travel looks like.

You won't be too surprised to hear me argue that the relationship between universities, knowledge and wider society has changed quite dramatically over the past 40 years.

This is partly evidenced by the ways this relationship is represented: politically; institutionally; rhetorically; in academic and grey literature; and through practice.

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In particular, the politics of research have changed considerably over the past 10 years. Institutional calls to embed pathways to impact within research design, for example, are now a routine part of the higher education landscape in the UK.

A key part of my academic leadership role over recent years have been to support research leaders, academics and professional staff as they adapted to this changing context. We have the REF; the KEF is on the way.

It seems reasonable to ask at a conference with a theme such as this, therefore:

What could be next for knowledge exchange and engaged research?

UKRI have recently published a statement about engagement as part of its [2019 Delivery Plans](#); see the image on this slide.

They consulted widely across the sector in producing the statement on engagement, and in their consideration of how to support further change in universities.

The text is well worth reviewing in detail. For now, I'd like to note the following key points.

The text starts by arguing that, and I quote:

"UKRI will only achieve its goals if we support research and innovation that is built on the knowledge, priorities and values of society and is open to participation by people from all backgrounds. This is because involving society leads to better outcomes: research and innovation that is more relevant, has more value and benefits more people."

The text goes on to highlight four goals that are represented in summary on this slide:

1. "Everyone in the UK has the opportunity to participate in research and innovation. [Everyone.]

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2. Researchers and innovators know why, when and how to actively involve people in their work and are supported and incentivised to do so.
3. Young people feel empowered to participate in research and innovation across the arts, humanities, STEM and social sciences [in effect, this goal covers all forms of knowledge.]
4. And that society plays an active role in shaping the direction of research and innovation." [This goal alludes to arguments about upstream engagement, and responsive ways of working.]

The point that I want to make here is this this looks on the face of it like a pretty progressive vision for engaged research and innovation.

The direction of travel looks promising for the next 12 months.

We await to see how these ambitious principles will be supported, and how success will be measured.



As a result of the changing conditions by which research is planned, assessed, monitored and reported, knowledge exchange and engaged research have received an increasing profile within the overall context of university business.

My interest as a researcher, academic leader, and as a practitioner over the previous 10 years has increasingly focused on this developing agenda, both in terms of understanding and informing these changes.

In particular, I've become interested in exploring how researchers, knowledge exchange professionals and universities justify engagement.

I recently wrote about this, see the paper on this slide (Holliman, 2017). In putting this paper together, I drew on ideas developed in support of environmental decision making from the late 1980s.

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Specifically, I explored how normative; substantive and instrumental motivations could be used to inform knowledge exchange and engaged research.

We can review the application of these motivations through the following questions.

- How can we ensure that engaged research and knowledge exchange reduce epistemic injustice and promotes fairness in knowing? That's the normative dimension.
- How can we ensure that engaged research and knowledge exchange improve the quality of research and knowledge exchange in the higher education system? That's the substantive dimension.
- And, how can we ensure that knowledge exchange and engagement are sustainable for all participants in these processes? That's the instrumental dimension.

These are not the only questions we can use to examine these motivations. However, they should give you some indication of how they can be applied.

In providing some indicative answers to these questions, I'm going to introduce a philosophical lens using:

1) Fabien Medvecky's concept of 'fairness in knowing';

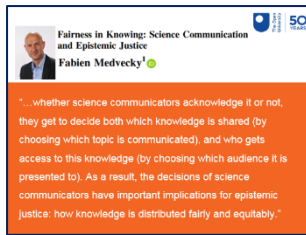
and

2) Miranda Fricker's concept of 'epistemic injustice'.

My argument is that a moral imperative should underpin conceptualisations of research and knowledge exchange.

University staff should seek to reduce epistemic injustice and promote 'fairness in knowing'.

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[Fabien Medvecky](#) introduced me to the related concepts of 'fairness in knowing' and epistemic injustice.

In the quote on this slide he highlights the importance of taking an ethical approach when planning science communication activities.

He argues:

"...whether science communicators acknowledge it or not, they get to decide both which knowledge is shared (by choosing which topic is communicated), and who gets access to this knowledge (by choosing which audience it is presented to). As a result, the decisions of science communicators have important implications for epistemic justice: how knowledge is distributed fairly and equitably" ([Medvecky, 2017: 1393](#)).

The implication of Fabien's work is that the decisions academics make in relation to communication, shape and frame the possibilities for who routinely consumes research, and what types of research are heard.

Two key questions follow from this work that have relevance for this conference:

- 1) Does this situation also apply to research and knowledge exchange, e.g. in terms of who has a voice in these activities, and how those voices are enabled to be heard?

and

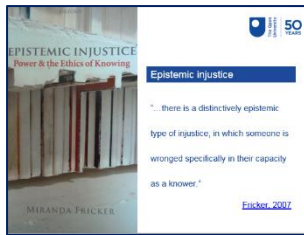
- 2) Should we leave the design of research and knowledge exchange solely to academics?

If we refer back to the recent publication by UKRI of its *Delivery Plans* for 2019, the answers to these questions are:

Yes, everyone in the UK should have the opportunity to participate in research and innovation. Part of our role is enabling different voices to be heard.

No, we should not leave the design of research and knowledge exchange solely to academics; society should play an active role in shaping the direction of research and innovation.

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Fabien's work led me to that of Miranda Fricker, a philosopher who has written extensively about epistemic injustice.

On this slide, Fricker argues that:

"...there is a distinctively epistemic type of injustice, in which someone is wronged specifically in their capacity as a knower."

I found her work to be really powerful in the context of knowledge exchange and engaged research, not least because she argues that to understand and address issues of epistemic injustice requires that we take account of the distribution of social power, placing this concept within broader patterns of social injustice.

Several important questions follow from Fricker's work that university staff should consider.

For the record, I'm including academics and knowledge exchange professionals within this term.

Are university staff making fair and reasonable decisions in relation to:

- 1) how knowledge is produced, and with whom?
- 2) which knowledge is shared, and who has access to it?

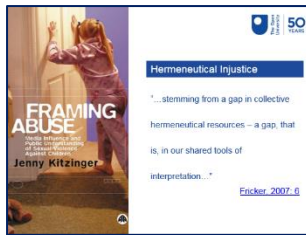
and

- 3) how knowledge is shared?

Put another way, are we consistently promoting fairness in knowing when we make decisions about who to exchange knowledge with, why, how, how we recognise contributions, and so on?

Not to do so, I argue, is likely to result in epistemic injustice.

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Fricker goes on to describe two distinct forms of epistemic injustice: hermeneutical and testimonial.

I will explore each of them in turn, and offer an illustrative example.

First, let's consider hermeneutical injustice.

Fricker argues that this sort of injustice stems:

"...from a gap in collective hermeneutical resources – a gap, that is, in our shared tools of interpretation..." (Fricker, 2007: 7)

She goes on to argue, "...that the cognitive disadvantage created by this gap impinges on different social groups." (ibid.)

What does this mean in practice? I encountered a form of hermeneutical injustice when I was working at Glasgow University. In effect, this was my first research job.

I worked for Jenny Kitzinger who, at that time, was leading a project funded by the ESRC. The subject matter of the project was particularly challenging; a study of media influence and public understanding of sexual violence against children (see the front cover of her book on this slide).

As one of my tasks Jenny asked me to conduct some research on *The Times Index*; that being a catalogue of all stories published in this newspaper in a given year. She wanted to know when *The Times* had started to use the term child sexual abuse to categorise news reports.

The answer was in the early 1980s. Prior to this, this was a social grouping and a crime that was either defined in different ways, or not at all. In effect, victims of this crime suffered hermeneutical injustice, because they were denied shared tools of representation.

Jenny's research helped to raise the profile of victims of this awful crime (Kitzinger, 2004). She was part of a wider movement that helped individuals to assemble as a social grouping and activist community, and then to seek greater epistemic (and legal) justice.

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In effect, Jenny's leadership of this research project helped to promote hermeneutical justice for the victims of child sexual abuse.



I was struck by a number of examples from the conference abstracts where UEL researchers are seeking to promote hermeneutical justice.

I've selected an example by Darren Sharpe, Angela Harden, Emma Green to illustrate the point.

Please note the highlighted sections, where the authors argue that:

"In this presentation we will describe the impact of the research we have undertaken to develop and test a young commissioner's model which empowers young people to actively participate in the commissioning of health and social care services. As well as building resilience amongst young commissioners..."

I argue that, in adopting this approach, the authors are promoting hermeneutical justice through the use of participatory methods that build capacity and resilience among publics who may have previously been excluded from being active participants in research and its application.

This requires university staff to include relevant forms of expertise and experience in research and knowledge exchange activities, then enabling these people to contribute in ways that are meaningful to them.

If we refer back to the UKRI *2019 Delivery Plans*, these authors are ensuring the young people feel empowered to participate in research and innovation.

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The second key concept that Fricker defines is testimonial injustice. In defining this concept, Fricker argues that:

“...a speaker suffers testimonial injustice [...] if prejudice on the hearer’s part causes him [or her] to give the speaker less credibility than he [or she] would otherwise have given”. (Fricker, 2007: 4)

In practice, testimonial injustice plays out in the related concepts of credibility excess versus credibility deficit.

This form of injustice has serious implications for who has a voice in research, not least because if one perspective dominates, other voices with relevant expertise and experience may not be heard.

What does this mean in practice?

My first recollection of testimonial injustice was when I was studying for my PhD. Drawing on the methodologies and methods that I’d encountered in Glasgow, in my PhD I studied media representations of the sciences (Holliman, 2000).

One of the case studies I explored was the cloning of sheep, using somatic cell transfer. The image on this slide is of Dolly the sheep as a lamb with her surrogate mother.

The PR-informed announcement that Dolly had been cloned caused worldwide media coverage from February 1997 onwards.

Partly in response, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority teamed up with what was then the Human Genetics Advisory Commission to run a consultation. The aim was to explore how public agencies should respond to what was then an emerging technology.

A range of stakeholders, including politicians, scientists, ethicists, religious leaders and activists were involved.

I was struck by the absence of citizens, and in particular, young voices in the consultation. ‘The public’ were represented, as was standard practice for

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consultations that I reviewed at the time, by journalists. For the purpose of consultations, they were considered to be 'lay members'.

One journalist representing 'the public'. We've come a long way since then.

I decided to address this issue of representation in my PhD research. I used a technique called the 'newsgame' to explore: how different subcultural groups interpreted and contextualised media reports about the sciences?

I constructed a structured sample, representing different publics, and scientists. One of those publics was young people.

I approached several schools and asked if I could interview some of their students: one school agreed. Initially, this school asked if I wanted to garner the views of what they would now classify as gifted and talented students. In my experience of working with schools since that time, this is often a default response.

In response, I asked if it would be possible to work with other students. In the end, I worked with A-Level students who were not taking any exams at the end of their sixth-form studies. It turned out that they were perfectly knowledgeable about cloning, media and some of the longer-term implications of human reproductive cloning.

This example, and the testimonial injustice that it exemplifies, raises important questions for me about who should have a voice in research.

15 years later, when I worked with Andy Squires and Helen Brown from Denbigh School in Milton Keynes on an RCUK application to become a School-University Partnership, I recalled the young people who had contributed to my PhD research. It occurred to me that a good proportion of them could now be parents, some perhaps of the children with whom we would be engaging.

We conceptualise the students' roles within this project in the following way:

"...children and young people [as] the pool of talent from which the next generation of expertise will develop. They are also prospective citizens with a stake in how research agendas are framed and prioritised.

Furthermore, they will have some responsibility for managing the benefits and challenges that arise from the social and economic impact of these studies (Holliman et al. 2018)."

In effect, we argued that children and young people should have a voice in research. They have a right to be engaged in ways that are meaningful to them.

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Again, I was struck by a number of examples from the conference abstracts where UEL researchers are seeking to promote testimonial justice.

I've selected this illustrative example by Tom Gerken.

In this extract from the full abstract, the author argues that:

"Previous research in the area of participatory media has shown that the whole performative space of participatory radio can support the inclusion, non-formal learning and employability of socially excluded groups."

I argue that, in adopting this approach, the author is promoting testimonial justice by enabling voices that might previously have been excluded to be heard.

If we refer back to the UKRI *2019 Delivery Plans*, this author is supporting the principle that everyone in the UK should have the opportunity to participate in research and innovation.



Adopting the underpinning principle that university staff should seek to promote 'fairness in knowing' influences the ways we plan for, assess, monitor and report research and knowledge exchange.

I argue that high-quality planning is an essential first step. This, I hope, will be obvious to many of you.

In my experience, which is supported by research that I've led, this is clearly not obvious to all university staff.

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I recently Chaired the Working Group that produced the STFC Report shown on this slide (Holliman et al. 2019). STFC, the Science and Technology Facilities Council, supports research conducted by physical scientists and engineers.

The report, *Pathways to Excellence in Public Engagement*, documents evidence about the current state-of-play in the peer review system that underpins the allocation of funding for public engagement with research.

We identified challenges with all aspects of the peer review system.

Key to this was a lack of high-quality upstream planning, involving relevant stakeholders, community groups, citizens, and so on. The quote, from a Principal Investigator illustrates this problem:

"We just did our [name of] grant. I wrote the Pathways to Impact section. I consulted no one, and I did it in about two hours, and that included a coffee break. I think I pretty much wrote it off the top of my head."

This, I argue, is not an approach that is likely to deliver fairness in knowing, or quality for that matter.

There are, of course, alternatives to this approach. In the final part of my talk this morning, I'd like to discuss one such approach.

To be clear before I move on, the STFC Public Engagement Team had the courage to explore these issues, and are actively working to address them. This is not an STFC problem. Where this is an issue, it is sector-wide.



I argue that engaged research design, ideally involving representatives with whom you seek to engage, gives you a much better chance of promoting fairness in knowing.

If we get this right, we can build capacity in ways of engaging that are fair, equitable, and meaningful to the various participants.

How then should we plan for engaged research and knowledge exchange?

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Through the two projects shown on this slide, colleagues and I at the Open University developed a principled framework, involving seven dimensions, to support engaged research design.

There is a worked example of this framework written up in this edited collection (Holliman et al. 2017).

The dimensions are shown in the schematic on the left. I'll briefly introduce each of them.

People: Who are the publics, stakeholders, community groups, end-users, etc. who could or should be engaging? Is anyone routinely excluded? I'll come back to this dimension in a minute.

Politics: Do all the people who should be involved understand the wider 'political' (small and big p) context for the engaged research or knowledge exchange?

Preparedness: Have you explored the literature on engagement or knowledge exchange that is relevant to your field? Have you critically analysed relevant theories, methods and modes of engagement and used your analyses to inform, but not dominate your planning. Have other participants been given genuine opportunities to bring their expertise and experience to the table?

Purposes: What are the aims and objectives of the knowledge exchange or engaged research? Have the publics, stakeholders, end-users, etc. been consulted about what they would like the outcomes of the engaged research or knowledge exchange to be? If not, what proposals could be made for consulting with these constituencies about the purposes of the research?

Processes: How will the engaged research or knowledge exchange involve people in meaningful ways? When, and how often, will these constituencies be involved? Where are these interventions likely to take place, and through what mechanisms? Do different constituencies need different ways to engage?

Participation: What measures are proposed for exploring how the publics, stakeholders and end-users and researchers have participated? How will the findings be used to improve future practice?

Performance: This is your chance to examine the impact of these activities. What were the changes, effects and/or benefits? Were the objectives met, for everyone?

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I want to emphasise the importance of thinking strategically about who should be involved in the planning of research and knowledge exchange from the point where they can influence this in ways that are meaningful to them.

This is crucial to promoting fairness in knowing and reducing epistemic injustice.

By 'people' I mean stakeholders, end-users, community groups, NGOs, citizens, etc. In short, if the person or organisation doesn't work for or represent a Higher Education Institution in any way, they count for the purpose of engaged research design.

In many instances, the ideal point at which to create your publics for research or knowledge exchange will be at the point when a project is being conceived. However, it could be that other people are invited further downstream for particular reasons; others may leave before the activity is fully completed.

Two social scientists who were working at the OU at the time, Nick Mahony and Hilde Stephansen, developed a strategy for creating publics for engagement.

One of them, Nick Mahony, produced the open access pamphlet shown on this slide.

In the pamphlet, Nick introduces the three dimensions for creating 'publics' that are listed on this slide ([Mahony, 2015](#)).

First, let's consider questions of *representation* ([Mahony, 2015](#)). Addressing this dimension requires us to consider who should have a voice in research for particular reasons, who is excluded and why?

Targeting publics through representation can involve segmentation analysis, forms of sampling, recruitment of specific voices, etc.

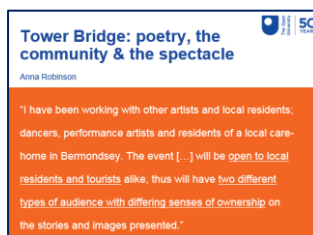
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It could also involve working with a particular organisation that represents a community with a view to then working in partnership with them to share learning from a project with that wider community.

The second dimension focuses on the types of expertise and experience that can enhance the engaged research process (Mahony, 2015).

This dimension requires us to recognise that intelligence is not the preserve of academics (Stilgoe et al. 2006). Knowledge too comes in different forms; academic papers are not the sole repository of useful and relevant knowledge.

The third dimension invites us to consider how we provide opportunities for public self-organisation (Mahony, 2015). How can we enable publics to become involved in research and knowledge exchange?



This example by Anna Robinson demonstrates two phases to the construction of publics for an engaged research project.

In Phase 1 she has been working with artists and local residents; dancers, performance artists and residents of a local care-home in Bermondsey.

I would need to discuss Anna's reasons for inviting these publics to contribution to the co-creation of this event.

It would be reasonable to assume that she has selected these publics for reasons of representation, and also to include forms of experience and expertise.

The second Phase is more open, allowing publics to self-organise as an audience.

She lists local residents and tourists, self-organising as the audience for this event.

Crucially, she notes that these different audiences are likely to have a different sense of ownership of the stories and images that are presented.

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That is because they have been selected as publics for different purposes, and have played different roles in this activity.

Taken together, I argue that this presentation demonstrates a sophisticated approach to creating publics for research and knowledge exchange.



I'd like to summarise a few key points before we move to the panel discussion.

I started this talk by highlighting some of the similarities between the UEL and the OU through research and knowledge exchange work.

I can see links in terms of a shared commitment to be inclusive, responsive, and responsible.

If the UKRI *Delivery Plans* for 2019 are taken forward into the next strategic planning phase for publicly-funded engagement with research, I think both institutions are well-placed to deliver on these commitments.

To deliver on this ambitious programme requires a more nuanced take on what it means to increase our reach in our research and knowledge exchange activities.

I've argued today that we can realise this agenda through a commitment to 'fairness in knowing', which, in turn, can be realised through Engaged Research Design.

Obviously, this is my take on these issues. Today, we have the opportunity to share learning, and I'm looking forward to hearing how you have addressed similar challenges and opportunities.

If I can suggest one final action before we move to the panel discussion; that is to attend a session that is outside of your disciplinary background.

Having worked across all disciplines at the Open University over recent years, I have learnt so much from exploring how academics and professionals have addressed these issues from a different disciplinary starting point.

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Finally, a reminder that if you'd like a copy of my slides they are available from the URL listed on this slide: www.open.ac.uk/blogs/per. Thank you.

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